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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000058

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: THE VIEW FROM BASRA U: STUDENTS MOTIVATED TO VOTE FOR  
INDIVIDUALS RATHER THAN PARTIES

REF: A) BAGHDAD 2014 B) BASRAH 052

BASRAH 00000058 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: John Naland, Leader, PRT Basra, Dept of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

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Summary  
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11. (C) Conversations with a dozen students at Basra University's School of Law reveal strong interest in the upcoming national elections, but also fears that fraud will occur without strong oversight by international observers. All the students support an open list ballot, and the majority say that they will vote based on the reputation of the individual candidates rather than along sectarian or party lines. All the students believed that Iraq's neighbors are exerting influence on politicians in Iraq, and most saw Iran as exerting great pressure on Basra's local politicians. In a validation of the old saying that "all politics is local," most of the students believe that the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad will not affect Prime Minister Maliki's popularity in the south, where Basrawis credit him with bringing normalcy to the region. As for the provincial government, the students, unlike residents in poorer areas, are willing to give it more time to produce results. End summary.

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Eager to Vote, but for Individuals Not Parties  
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12. (C) During a visit to Basra University, PRToff held impromptu conversations with a dozen students in the school's cafeteria. While all the students showed an interest in the upcoming national elections, only a few were following the ongoing wrangling in Baghdad over the elections law or the building of political coalitions. Several noted that a dearth of pre-election coverage in the local media left them with little information to form opinions on the coalitions. All of the students expressed a strong interest in voting in the elections, though several voiced concerns about possible fraud. One student who had worked with the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in the last national election made a plea for a significant presence of international election observers to prevent the fraud that he and other students believe occurred in the first national election.

13. (C) Every student the PRT spoke with strongly supported an open list ballot. Though they personally saw this as the most democratic approach, several students also cited the call by Grand Ayatollah Sistani for an open list as religious validation for their own beliefs (REF A). When asked how they would decide their vote, the majority said that they would cast their ballot for the candidates who could deliver results based upon their reputations in the community. They explicitly noted that they would not vote based on sectarian considerations or party

affiliation. Several students expressed strong views that the parties appealing most to religion were the ones that had shown the least ability to govern, and were merely using religion as a cover.

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Foreign Influence Not Welcome Here

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14. (C) The students unanimously saw and voiced unease about meddling by Iraq's neighbors in the Iraqi political process. They all expressed strong concerns about Iran's influence in southern Iraq and in particular on Basra's politicians. They attributed Iran's influence in Basra to proximity and the support Iran provides national political parties and politicians in Basra. Several students mentioned that the government was not building a new port in al-Faw on the Persian Gulf (REF B) because of Iranian opposition and fears that it could be used by the U.S. military as a launching pad for an invasion of Iran.

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Maliki Remains Strong Even as Security Deteriorates

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15. (C) Most of the students said that the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad would not diminish Prime Minister Maliki's popularity among Basrawis. While they saw both positive and negative in Maliki's tenure, they all credited him with restoring normalcy to Basra with the spring 2008 Charge of the Knights military campaign. Several were quick to blame Maliki's advisors -- but not Maliki -- for perceived failures, such as minimal improvement in essential services. One student related how the Charge of the Knights had improved life on campus by ridding it of Islamic extremists who had enforced religious restrictions on the students. Now, he noted, male and female students were free to socialize, and campus life was much freer.

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BASRAH 00000058 002.2 OF 002

Comment

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16. (C) The students the PRT talked to represent the middle and upper class of Basra society. They are smart, educated, and informed. What comes across in discussions with them is their strong interest in the national elections as an opportunity to exercise their right to vote. In a validation of the saying that "all politics is local," they appear to use local criteria for deciding how to vote nationally. As for their view of the local provincial government, while they recognize that the reconstruction of Basra is going slowly, they consider Governor Shilagh Abud al Mayah (Da'wa) to be hard-working, and are willing to give the new government here more time to produce results. This view contrasts markedly with those voiced in poorer areas of the province. Residents there vocally decry the lack of electricity and water, and readily denounce the new provincial government and consider it corrupt for not solving such major problems within months of taking office.

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